

Commissioner's Monthly Column

Louisiana Automobile Theft and Insurance Fraud Prevention Authority Update

June, 2008

I am pleased to announce that the Louisiana Automobile Theft and Insurance Fraud Prevention Authority (LATIFPA), a public agency within the Department of Insurance created in 2004, has been effective in assisting law enforcement in combating motor vehicle theft, including fraud by theft and other criminal acts. LATIFPA incorporates a multifaceted approach of providing resources to law enforcement through its programs in the areas of the state where auto theft and insurance fraud is most severe, as well as raising public awareness, statewide, about auto theft and insurance fraud.

LATIFPA, in conjunction with the National Insurance Crime Bureau, kicked off its Vehicle Investigation Prevention Enforcement Response (VIPER) Program in 2006. The VIPER Program equips bait vehicles placed in areas with a high incidence of auto theft with the latest digital video and audio recording devices as well as tracking devices. Police are alerted when the bait vehicle has been entered, at which time the thief is arrested. To date, the program has generated 53 arrests for simple burglary, vehicle burglary, property damage, possession of marijuana, being a fugitive from the East Baton Rouge Sheriff's Office and being a fugitive from probation and parole. We are looking forward to continued success with the VIPER Program.

In addition, LATIFPA has launched its License Plate Recognition Program. License Plate Recognition or LPR units are capable of reading thousands of license plates from stationery or moving vehicles. These LPR units will be used by law enforcement as an effective tool in recovering stolen vehicles, combating criminal activity, enhancing productivity and improving officer safety.

A school education program began throughout Louisiana in May 2007 in middle schools and in April 2008 in high schools. The "Consequences of Auto Theft" one-hour curriculum targets middle school students and "The Park Smart – New Driver" one-hour curriculum targets high school students. The programs teach students about the consequences of auto theft and how to avoid having your vehicle stolen. LATIFPA has taken the curriculum to 4,704 middle school students and to 1,290 high school students. This program will continue into the next school year.

LATIFPA hosted the annual meeting of the Auto Theft Prevention Authorities around the country in New Orleans in May 2008. This conference focused on developing national initiatives that reduce auto theft and explored local initiatives that have had promising results in various states. The participants at this conference entertained the idea of adopting a national slogan and a national and international cooperative initiative to create a marketing plan that could be utilized and customized by the Auto Theft Prevention Authority Committee members. This will address education and public

awareness about vehicle theft, public safety as it pertains to vehicle theft, identification and prevention of vehicle theft and, more importantly, the impact stolen vehicles have on organized crime, drive by shootings, boarder crossings, drug trafficking and even terrorist acts.

This fiscal year, LATIFPA will initiate the "Give-Up" training program targeting insurance claims investigators and law enforcement auto theft investigators throughout the state. This program will produce training DVDs to enhance investigative skills so they may more effectively identify and prevent fraudulent auto theft claims. The DVD for insurance claims investigators will look at include typical fraudulent auto theft insurance claims and what steps insurance companies can take to prevent them. It will also include an easy-to-follow guide for processing auto theft claims. The DVD for law enforcement personnel will show how asking the right questions and paying close attention to details can lead to the arrest of criminals filing false auto theft reports. It also includes a questionnaire to act as a guide for officers when taking an auto theft report.

July 2008 is designated as National Vehicle Theft Protection Month. LATIFPA joined forces with the National Insurance Crime Bureau and LoJack Corporation in promoting ways to prevent vehicle theft.

A Public Awareness Campaign to increase awareness and prevention of auto theft and insurance fraud is planned for this fiscal year targeting cities with the highest rates of auto theft and insurance fraud. This campaign will incorporate radio ads that will highlight the economic, social and public safety consequences of auto theft. It will inform and encourage public participation in auto theft and insurance fraud prevention and enforcement efforts. It will also encourage the use of fraud hotlines to report suspected auto theft and suspicious insurance fraud activity.

Plans are underway for the first statewide Auto Theft and Insurance Fraud Conference to be hosted by LATIFPA on October 14, 2008 in Baton Rouge. This conference will offer a complete range of information needed to develop, implement and manage auto theft and insurance fraud prevention programs. National vehicle theft experts and state and federal fraud experts will present information on insurance fraud and auto theft investigation and prosecution. Insurance professionals, prosecutors, law enforcement officials, special investigations unit managers and supervisors, insurance defense attorneys and other experts will have an opportunity to exchange views and share ideas and experiences with their peers and those in attendance. You will be hearing more about this conference from the Department of Insurance as the date approaches.

For additional information about programs implemented under LATIFPA, contact Denise Cassano, Director at 225-342-0819 or by e-mail at dcassano@ldi.state.la.us or Kevin Smith, Assistant Director at 225-219-0452 or by e-mail at ksmith@ldi.state.la.us. We encourage the use of our fraud hotline by contacting our Fraud Division at 225-342-4956 or by calling 1-800-259-5300 and asking for the Fraud Division.

